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ABSTRACT

This study gathered information on the acquisition of affixes in Urdu by native children. The research was carried out in the city of Irbid, in northern Jordan, and in the capital city of Amman. Data consist of tape-recorded, naturally occurring and elicited speech of 13 children aged 2.4 to 9 years. The children were native speakers of Urdu, living in a foreign country, and attending an English-medium school. Three supplementary tests of imitation, comprehension, and production of affixes were administered. Results indicate two stages of marked linguistic acquisition and production. Children aged 3.9-4.6 years mastered use of plural suffixes and verb conjugation according to number, person, and gender. The average mean length of utterance was high at this age because the children talked with little control of structure or vocabulary. Children aged 5.0-6.0 tried to imitate adult speech, showing an obvious increase in vocabulary due to mastery of two suffixes for making nouns and adjectives. Imitation appears to be the earliest acquired process, and comprehension preceded production. Negative prefixes were perceived and produced before positive ones. (MSE)

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**The Development of Affixes
in Urdu: A Case Study**

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is mainly to gather information on the acquisition of affixes in Urdu by native children. The field work of this project was conducted in the city of Irbid, in the northern part of Jordan, as well as in the capital city, Amman. The data collected consists of tape-recorded, spontaneous, naturally occurring and elicited speech from children between the ages of 2.4 and 9 years who were visited on the average of four and a half hours each. Three supplementary tests on the imitation, comprehension and production of affixes were also administered. Young children's performance on the imitation test was higher than on the comprehension one, which, in turn, was higher than on the production test.

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Introduction

In order to trace the acquisition of prefixes and suffixes in Urdu by young children, one must analyse three main components: production, comprehension and imitation. These components are inter-related, but the question is the order in which they occur in the process of language development. Bloom (1974) concludes that it certainly seems to be true that there are times when production precedes comprehension as well as times when comprehension precedes production, but it appears to be too early to draw firm conclusions about the general order of development in these two spheres of language acquisition. Palermo (1978) adds saying, "Surely the complex interaction of the four factors of comprehension, production, cognitive status of the developing child, and the context in which language is used will not allow a simple statement that comprehension precedes or follows production in the process of acquisition. The relative importance of each variable will differ in each situation and at different developmental levels". On the other hand, Fraser, Bellugi and Brown (1963) , as well as Lovell and Dixon (1967) and Nurss and Day (1971) found that imitative production was more advanced than comprehension. Thus, we feel it is significant to see if these findings relating to Indo-European languages also apply to Urdu.

Procedures

I - Subjects

This project has been carried out on 13 children whose native language is Urdu. Their ages vary between 2.4 and 9 years; they live in a foreign country, Jordan, and go to an English-medium school. This means that their mental processes are, to a large extent, being developed in English and not in Urdu. Nevertheless, all these children have a good command of spoken Urdu since they speak it at home. Learning reinforcement is provided by parents, Urdu films and songs and, in the case of a few children, reading in Urdu.

II - Apparatus

The goal of this project is to test a child's ability to imitate, comprehend and produce the most common affixes in Urdu. A few target words (See Appendix 2) were illustrated with pictures. In the case of some words which are quite abstract in sense, appropriate pictures were backed with a context, e.g. a fairy or folk tale well known to the children. Everything that a child said was recorded and then written down.

III - Testing of Imitation, Comprehension, Production

Imitation was tested by asking a child to repeat words and sentences. Comprehension was tested by asking a child to point out the pictures which represented a word. Older children (i.e. 3.6 years and above) were encouraged to explain words in their own language. Production was tested by allowing a child to describe a picture in his /her own words. At times, children were prompted in the hope that they would produce the target words. Results for each process were recorded according to the following scale:

- 0 = no reply / all wrong
- 1 = partly correct
- 2 = all correct

Results

Appendix 3 exhibits tables and charts showing the results obtained from the tests carried out on the 13 children in this study. The graph for the average MLU¹ of children between the ages of 2.4 and 9.0 years shows two stages of marked linguistic acquisition and production (fig 1). Children in the age group of 3.9 - 4.6 years master the use of the plural suffixes and the verb conjugation according to number, person and gender (Table 3). The average MLU is rather high (5.0 - 6.5) at this stage because children talk with little control. Also, their limited vocabulary forces them to replace a single marked form with a longer, yet simpler, expression. Children in the age group of 5.0 - 6.0 years try to imitate adult speech. They show an obvious increase in vocabulary (Table 3) as a result of their mastery of the two suffixes /i:/ used respectively for making nouns and adjectives. (Appendix 1 presents a list of phonetic symbols with examples). Figure 2 shows the relationship between imitation, comprehension and production. By comparing the proportion of correct results given by each child at a given age, it is clear that imitation is the earliest acquired process. Comprehension precedes production, a fact clearly represented by tables 2 and 3. Surprisingly, tables 2 and 3 also show that negative prefixes are perceived and produced before the positive ones. This interesting phenomenon is discussed in detail later.²

Discussion

Development of the suffix /i:/

1) Noun → Adjective

2) Adjective → Noun

The formation of adjectives from nouns by adding the suffix /i:/ is learned before the ability to form nouns from adjectives by adding the suffix /i:/. Possible reasons can be:

1) culturally and linguistically, children become aware of nouns before adjectives; (Beck, 1979)

2) nouns which undergo the transformation N + /i:/ → Adj refer to aspects in the child's immediate experience,

e.g. love /pja:r/

fussing /zid/

dirt /gand/

mischief /ʃara:ret/

These nouns, and the resulting adjectives, are regularly used by parents to either reward or punish a child from a very early age;

3) nouns derived from adjectives are semantically abstract.

Comprehension and production of these words demand developed cognitive processes (4.6 - 5.0). In both cases, comprehension precedes production.

At 3.9 years, a child shows signs of perception and comprehension of adjectives derived from nouns by adding the suffix /i:/. When shown the picture of a girl and asked if she was pretty, the child denied the fact as follows:

/kja: jei larki pja:ri he/

Is this girl pretty?

/jei gandi he. atji nehi he/

She is bad. She is not good.

/mē atji huj. vs ki ʃal gandi he/

I am nice. Her face is bad.

Production of these adjectives is by chance. Children prefer to use several simpler words instead of one difficult word. Examples:

/jei a:dmi ʃara:bi he/

This man is drunk.

→ /jei a:dmi bə:hat piʃa: he/ This man has drunk a lot.

/batʃei qa:mʌ:ʃi sei kʰarei huwei hē/

Children are standing quietly.

→ /batʃei si:də: kʰarei huwei hē/

Children are standing straight.

Or, /ɪameɪ bətʃeɪ tʃɪp tʃɪ:p beʃeɪ hʊweɪ hɛ/

Here, children are sitting with their mouths shut.

At 3.9 years as well, children produce a few very common nouns derived from adjectives by adding the suffix /i:/. They do not know that both adjectives and nouns are related in meaning. They produce only those words which they perceive.

Child: /yeɪ billi bədma:ʃ hɛ/

This cat is naughty.

Informer: /kɪvʊ/

Why?

Child: /neɪ ətʃi hɛ. bədma:ʃi kətti/

She is not good. She does naughty things.

Child: /jeɪ billi ɡandi hɛ. tʃa:lɑ:kɪ kər reɪ hɛ/

This cat is bad. She is doing mischief.

Informer: /kɪvʊ/

Why?

Child: /jeɪ billi vs keɪ sɑ:re kɑ:dz leɪli hɛ/

This cat is taking all her cards.

Informer: /kɪɑ: jeɪ billi tʃa:lɑ:k hɛ/

Is this cat mischievous?

Child: /hɑ:ŋ tʃa:lɑ:k hɛ, ɡandi hɛ/

Yes, she is mischievous, she is bad.

Perception of these words comes before production. When asked, with the help of pictures, about the meaning of these words, children gave correct responses, although they did not use them when asked to describe the same pictures. (Tables 2 and 3)

At 4.6 years, children understand the relationship between nouns and the corresponding adjectives derived with the suffix /i:/. However, they must know the meaning of the noun in order to produce the adjective. Examples:

-- One child (4.0 years) knew the word /zɪd/ (the act of fussing); she promptly and correctly produced the adjective /zɪddi/ (fussy) in the appropriate context.

-- Another child (4.6 years) did not know that same word, i.e. /zɪd/; she could not produce its derived adjective either.

When given a context, she used a less marked adjective:

bad child

9

and comprehension of some prefixes. Evidence is found in comparing the comprehension ability of a 4.6 year old and a 5 year old. The 4.6 year old has no idea of the meaning of the positive prefixes /ba:/ and /nə/, The 5 year old understands words with these prefixes in their simplest meaning and when used in a context. (Table 2)

Example: Adult Model: /jei batʒa: ba:s dab he/
This is a respectful child.

Child's version: /jei batʒa: atʒa: he/
This is a good child.

However, the 4.6 year old correctly perceives the negative element in the prefix /na:/, thus establishing the observation that negative prefixes are learned before the positive ones.

Example: Adult Model: /jei na:mvmkin ka:m he/
This is an impossible job.

Child's version: /betʒa: ha:ti kʒ: nehi dakeil saktə:/
The boy cannot push the elephant.

The negative element in the prefix /bei/ is also perceived but only in a context where the word occurs. In this case, it is invariably interpreted in a literal sense.

Example: Adult Model: /billi beizabɑ:n dʒɑ:nwar he/
The cat is an animal which does not have a language.

Child's version: /billi kei pɑ:s zabɑ:n nehi he/
The cat does not have a tongue.

The 5 year old shows a better understanding of words with the negative prefixes.

Example: Adult Model: /billi beizabɑ:n dʒɑ:nwar he/
The cat is an animal which does not have a language.

Child's version: /billi ba:t nehi karti wʒ: mi:ja:w
bʒ:lti/

The cat does not speak; she says "miau".

At 8 years, the child might perceive the positive prefix /n /. This is due to the fact that this prefix, as well as /b :/, are borrowed from Persian.⁴ Words that contain them are marked forms used basically in formal language.

Example: /nədgəwa:ŋ/ (a youth) is replaced by
/əik dʒəwa:n a:dmi/ (a young man).
 ↓ ↓ ↓
 Det Adj N

For the above reason, production of words with prefixes does not occur before the age of 8 years. Production is limited to a conscious effort on the part of the child. Below are some examples where production involves a lot of prompting on the part of the adult.

Examples:

Child: /eik a: dmi ha: ti kɔ: dʰakeilna: bʰa: ha: he/
A man wants to push an elephant.

Adult: /kja: ha: ti kɔ: dʰakeilna: a: sa: n ka: m he/
Is it an easy job to push an elephant?

Child: /nehi mu: ʃkil ka: m hɔ: ta: /
No, it is a difficult job.

Adult: /kitna: mu: ʃkil hɔ: ta: /
How difficult is it?

Child: /bɔ: ha: t zi: ja: da: /
Very.

Adult: /plɪr tɔ: tʌm ha: ti kɔ: nehi dʰakeil sakteɪ /
Then, you cannot push the elephant?

Child: /nehi jei tɔ: na: mʌmkin ka: m he /
No, it is an impossible job.

Child: /eik lɔ: ka: ʋpni si: t eik bu: ddi ɟɔ: rət kɔ: dei ra: ha: he /
A boy is giving up his seat to an aged lady.

Adult: /kja: jei bətʰa: ətʰa: he /
Is this boy good?

Child: /ha: ɲ bɔ: ha: t ka: nd he /
Yes, he is very kind.

Adult: /is bətʰei kei əda: b kesi heɲ /
How are this boy's manners?

Child: /ətʰei heɲ /
They are good.

Adult: /kja: jei bətʰa: ədɔ: b sei peɪʃ a: ra: ha: he /
Is this boy behaving with respect?

Child: /ha: ɲ /
Yes.

Adult: /esei bətʰei kɔ: kja: kehteɪ heɲ /
What do we call such a boy?

Child: /ətʰa: bətʰa: /
A good boy.

Adult: /ɔr kja:/

What else?

Child: /wə: ba:ədəb bətʒə: he/

He is a respectful boy.

Conclusions and suggestions

It would be more valid to study the development of Urdu affixes by testing children who live in Pakistan and go to schools where the medium of instruction is Urdu. Such children are exposed to a more or less one language environment. Their responses will be more typical than those received from children living in a foreign country. It would also be interesting to study the rate at which a particular child masters his own language. This is a lengthy project which requires observing and testing particular children over a period of ten years, for example. The results thus obtained would permit more valid comparisons between different age groups who were exposed to identical social, cultural and linguistic environments.

Appendix 1 : A list of phonetic symbols with examples.

<u>Vowels</u>			
<u>Symbol</u>	<u>Example</u>	<u>Symbol</u>	<u>Example</u>
[ʌ]	<u>bat</u>	[ɔ:]	<u>board</u>
[ɑ:]	<u>farm</u>	[ʊ]	<u>full</u>
[e]	<u>set</u>	[u:]	<u>root</u>
[ə]	<u>above</u>	[ʌ]	<u>come</u>
[ɜ:]	<u>fern</u>	[ɜ]	<u>salon</u>
[i]	<u>pity</u>	[æ:]	<u>carte blanche</u>
[i:]	<u>green</u>	[a]	<u>grass</u> (British English)
[ɔ]	<u>rot</u>		

<u>Diphthongs</u>			
<u>Symbol</u>	<u>Example</u>	<u>Symbol</u>	<u>Example</u>
[aɪ]	<u>lie</u>	[tɔ]	<u>fair</u>
[aʊ]	<u>cow</u>	[ɪə]	<u>here</u>
[eɪ]	<u>fate</u>	[ɔɪ]	<u>toy</u>
[oʊ]	<u>ago</u>	[uə]	<u>pure</u>

<u>Consonants</u>			
<u>Symbol</u>	<u>Example</u>	<u>Symbol</u>	<u>Example</u>
[b]	<u>bet</u>	[s]	<u>sit</u>
[d]	<u>dime</u>	[t]	<u>tell</u>
[f]	<u>face</u>	[w]	<u>wine</u>
[v]	<u>vine</u>	[z]	<u>zero</u>
[k]	<u>catch</u>	[ʒ]	<u>leisure</u>
[g]	<u>go</u>	[ʃ]	<u>sheep</u>
[h]	<u>hit</u>	[tʃ]	<u>church</u>
[j]	<u>yet</u>	[dʒ]	<u>judge</u>
[l]	<u>lick</u>	[θ]	<u>thin</u>
[m]	<u>mouth</u>	[ð]	<u>that</u>
[n]	<u>nut</u>	[x]	<u>loch</u>
[ŋ]	<u>bank</u>		no examples in English
[ŋ]	<u>pepper</u>		" " "
[r]	<u>rat</u>		" " "

Appendix 2: A list of the most common Urdu suffixes and prefixes,
with examples of words in which they occur. (Badqushani, 1969)

I - Plural Suffixes

Masculine		Feminine	
Sing /a:/	Plur /ei/	Sing /i:/	Plur /ja:ɳ/
/larka:/ boy	/larkai/ boys	/larki:/ girl	/larkja:ɳ/ girls
/batɟa:/ child	/batɟei/ children	/batɟi:/ child	/batɟja:ɳ/ children
/kila:nə:/ toy	/kila:nei/ toys	/ga:ri:/ car	/ga:rja:ɳ/ cars

II - Urdu has verb conjugation according to tense, person, gender and number.

/mei lik^h rehi hɳ/

I write progressive present
gender (fem)
number (sing)

/mei lik^h raha: hɳ/

I write progressive present
gender (masc)
number (sing)

→ I am writing.

III - Suffix /i:/

a. Adjective → Noun

/kandɟu:s/ stingy → /kandɟu:si:/ stinginess

/tɟa:la:k/ mischievous → /tɟa:la:ki:/ mischief

b. Noun → Adjective

/zaba:ɳ/ tongue → /zaba:ni:/ oral

/pja:r/ love → /pja:ri:/ lovely

/ɟəra:b/ drink → /ɟəra:bi:/ drunk

IV - Positive Prefixes

/ba:/ with

/ba:adab/ with respect → respectfully

/ba:xaida:/ with order → organized

/no/ new

/noɖʒwa:ŋ/ new in years → young

/noɾas/ new fruit

V - Negative Prefixes

/na:/ no(t)

/na:mvnkin/ not possible → impossible

/na:pa:k/ not clean → unclean

/bei/ without

/bei:ma:n/ without faith → unfaithful

/beizaba:n/ without tongue → speechless

VI - Positive Suffix /ət/

/ʃəri:r/ mischievous → /ʃara:rət/ mischief

/xeir/ well → /xeirjət/ well-being

Appendix 3
Tables and Figures

Table 1 Imitation test: Scores of children affix category items

Scores of children at different category items															
No. Type of item	Age 2.5 yrs			Age 3.8 yrs			Age 4.3 yrs		5 yrs	6.4 yrs	Age 7.3 yrs		Age 8 yrs		9 yrs
	C1	C2		C3	C4		C5	C6	C7	C8	C9	C10	C11	C12	C13
	0	1	2	0	1	2	0	1	2	0	1	2	0	1	2
1. Plural masc.	x			x			x			x			x		
2. Plural fem.	x			x			x			x			x		
3. Verb conjugation	x			x			x			x			x		
4. Adj. → Noun	x			x			x			x			x		
5. Noun → Adj.	x			x			x			x			x		
6. Adj. → Noun / et	x			x			x			x			x		
7. Negative prefix	x			x			x			x			x		
8. Positive prefix	x			x			x			x			x		
9. Total Score	3			5			10			13			16		

Table 2 Comprehension test: Scores of children affix category items

No.	Type of item	Age 2.5 yrs		Age 3.8 yrs		Age 4.3 yrs		5 yrs	6.4 yrs	Age 7.3 yrs		Age 8 yrs		9 yrs
		C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6	C7	C8	C9	C10	C11	C12	C13
		0 1 2	0 1 2	0 1 2	0 1 2	0 1 2	0 1 2	0 1 2	0 1 2	0 1 2	0 1 2	0 1 2	0 1 2	0 1 2
1.	Plural masc.	x	x											
2.	Plural fem.	x	x											
3.	Verb conjugation	x	x											
4.	Adj. → Noun	x	x											
5.	Noun → Adj.	x	x											
6.	Adj. → Noun / et	x	x											
7.	Negative prefix	x	x											
8.	Positive prefix	x	x											
9.	Total Score	0	1	10	7	13	12	14	14	14	14	15	15	16

Table 3 Production test: Scores of children affix category items

No.	Type of item	Age 2.5 yrs			Age 3.8 yrs			Age 4.3 yrs			5 yrs			6.4 yrs			Age 7.3 yrs			Age 8 yrs			9 yrs																	
		C1			C2			C3			C4			C5			C6			C7			C8			C9			C10			C11			C12			C13		
		0	1	2	0	1	2	0	1	2	0	1	2	0	1	2	0	1	2	0	1	2	0	1	2	0	1	2	0	1	2	0	1	2						
1.	Plural masc.	x				x				x				x				x				x				x				x				x						
2.	Plural fem.	x				x				x				x				x				x				x				x				x						
3.	Verb conjugation		x			x				x				x				x				x				x				x				x						
4.	Adj. → Noun	x				x				x				x				x				x				x				x				x						
5.	Noun → Adj.	x				x				x				x				x				x				x				x				x						
6.	Adj. → Noun /et/	x				x				x				x				x				x				x				x				x						
7.	Negative prefix	x				x				x				x				x				x				x				x				x						
8.	Positive prefix	x				x				x				x				x				x				x				x				x						
9.	Total Score		1			2				6				5				6				8				9				9				14		13		15		

0= all wrong/no reply
1= partly correct
2= all correct

Figure 1

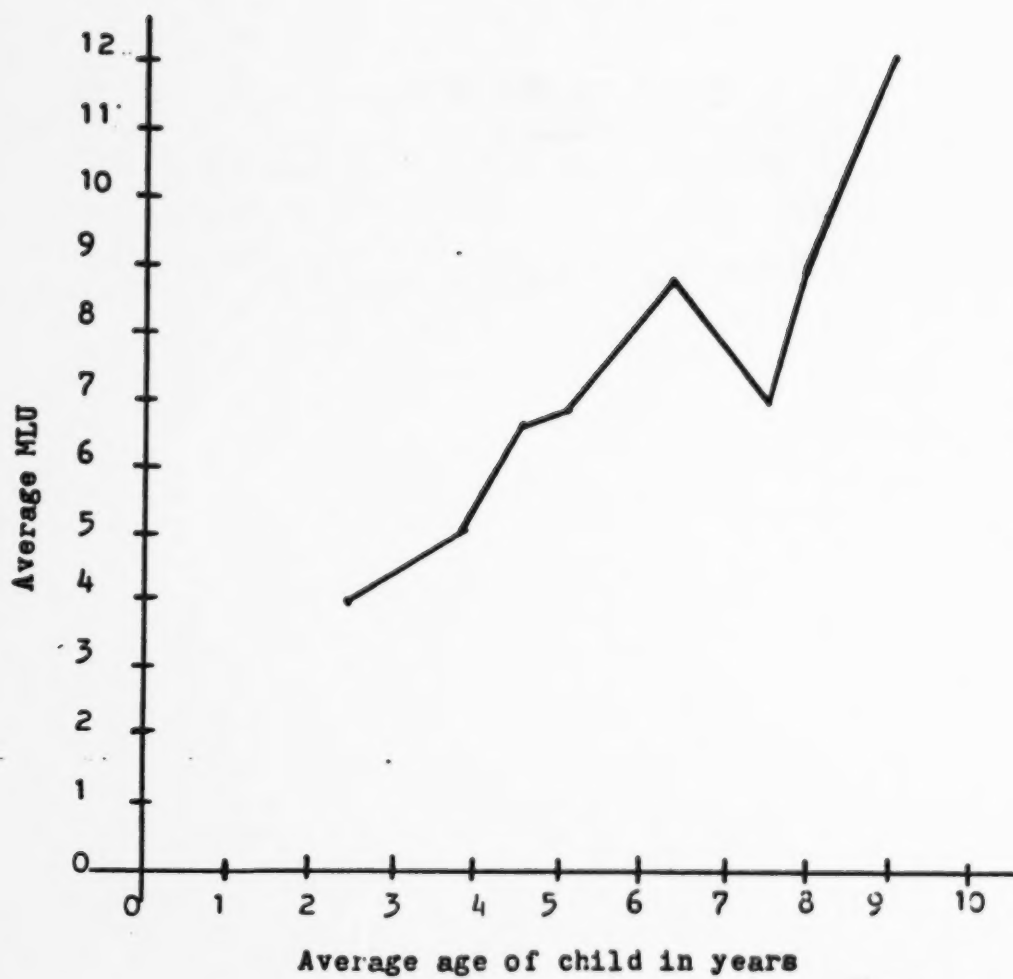
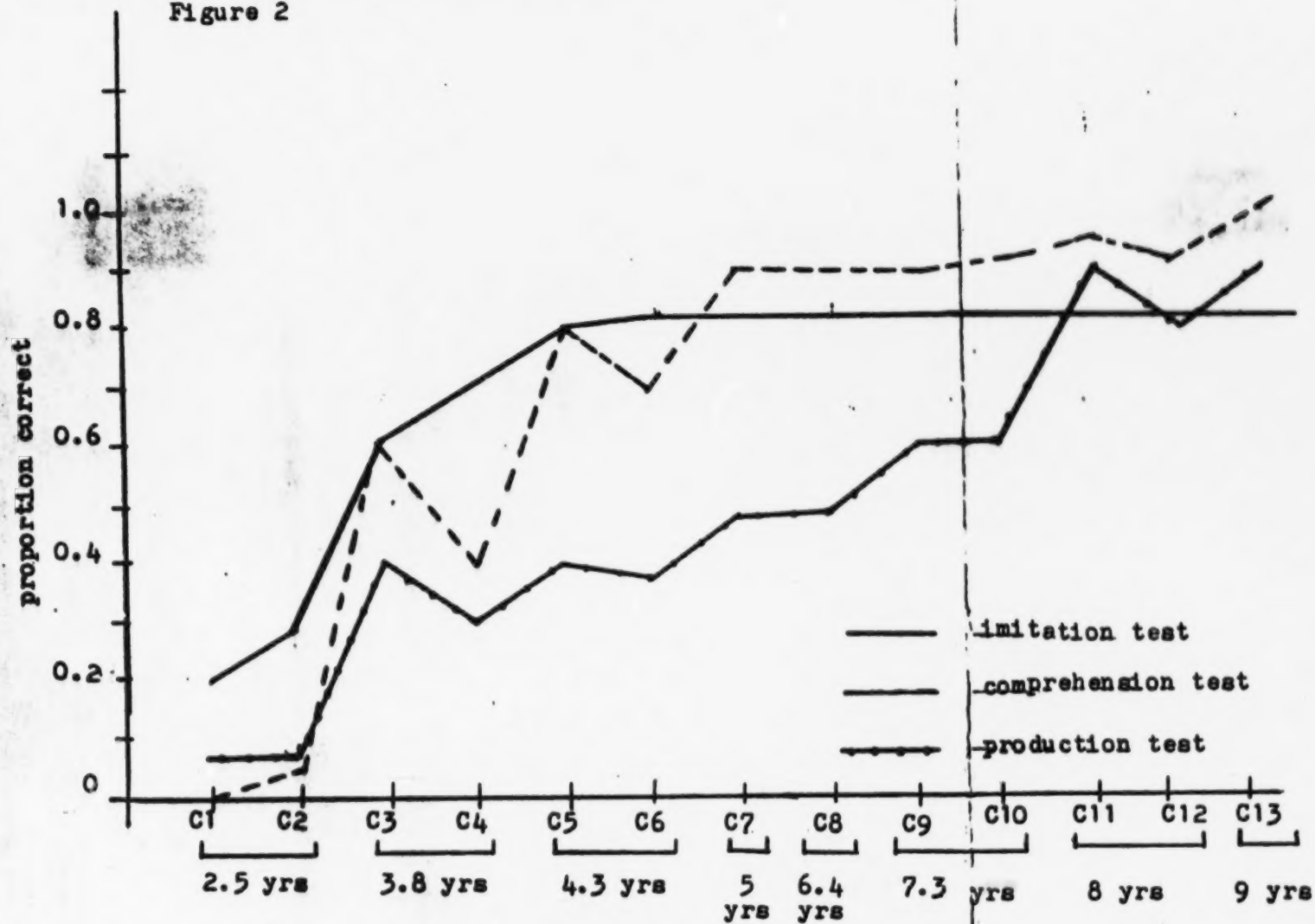


Figure 2



-19-

Notes

1. MLU, Mean Length of Utterance, is calculated as $\frac{\text{no. of morphemes}}{\text{no. of utterances}}$
2. The results graphed in the figures are arbitrary. Any irregularities are related to the nature of a particular child. For example, the two 7 year olds tested did not respond very well out of shyness. Child 3, age 3.8 years, has an unusually high production ability because she is a very bold and sociable child.
3. Encyclopaedia Britannica (1977, 9: 449).
4. See Badqushani, Urdu lugat (Lahore: Urdu Board Centre, 1969), p. 50 and p. 442.

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